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Approved For Release 2001/04/15 : CIA-RDP79B01709A003600010013-9

COMIREX-D-25.7/3

23 October 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR: Committee on Imagery Requirements and Exploitation

SUBJECT: Request for Change in Restrictions on the Use of
BLACK SHIELD Aircraft

In accordance with the discussion at the COMIREX meeting on 19 October 1967, there is circulated herewith for the information of members the paper on the above subject which had been prepared for submission to USIB but which is not being scheduled for action at this time.

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for Executive Secretary
Committee on Imagery Requirements and Exploitation

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NRO review(s) completed.

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SUBJECT : Change in Restrictions on the Use of BLACK SHIELD Aircraft

1. This memorandum contains a recommendation for a change in the restrictions governing the use of the BLACK SHIELD aircraft in North Vietnam to permit greater operational flexibility to avoid undue exposure to North Vietnamese defensive measures, and to perform more efficient coverage of priority targets along the border between China and North Vietnam. This recommendation is based on COMIREX integrated plans for the use of the BLACK SHIELD aircraft in the immediate border area [redacted] and drone coverage of targets in the interior of South China. The Department of State representative does not agree with this recommendation. His views are attached at Tab A.

2. COMIREX has reviewed [redacted] coverage acquired since June 1967 of North Vietnam and the area of South China immediately contiguous as follows:

a. BLACK SHIELD operations have obtained clear interpretable baseline coverage of most of North Vietnam except for a few areas adjacent to the Chinese border in the northeast portion of the country. This border is characterized by deep salients and because of the wide turning radius of the BLACK SHIELD aircraft and policy constraints prohibiting flight tracks that cross the Chinese salients, coverage of important targets in the border area has been degraded because of distance, obliquity, masking by terrain, and poor weather.

b. Coverage of North Vietnam acquired to date has confirmed with high confidence that no surface-to-surface strategic missiles have yet been deployed into North Vietnam.

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Also no tactical missile systems or related equipment such as that related to naval coastal defense and ground force systems have been detected. It is clear that coverage by the BLACK SHIELD aircraft provides a valuable means to continue this intelligence posture.

c. However, coverage of South China during this same period has been limited to oblique BLACK SHIELD photography acquired for the most part while making turns near the border area, [redacted] drone reconnaissance which has obtained photography of a few selected targets, and one U-2 TACKLE mission which obtained some coverage of the rail line from Nan Ning to North Vietnam. There are twenty-eight priority targets in South China near the North Vietnamese border.

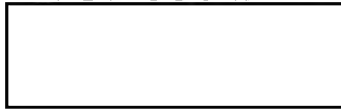
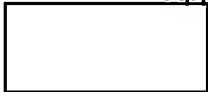
3. Since the last U-2 mission was accomplished, a U-2 has been lost over East China and a stand-down in TACKLE operations has ensued. Even with U-2 operations [redacted] experience has demonstrated that we are unlikely to achieve a satisfactory level of coverage of Chinese targets near the border. The task would be made easier, however, if a significant part of the reconnaissance of the North Vietnam/China border area were accomplished by BLACK SHIELD.

4. BLACK SHIELD could obtain additional coverage of South China if the present restrictions prohibiting overflight of the Chinese salients along the border were modified to permit the vehicle to fly flight lines "straightening the border." Key indicator targets and important segments of Chinese lines of communication to North Vietnam would be accessible to BLACK SHIELD coverage.

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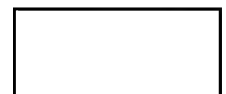
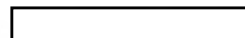


also within close proximity to the North Vietnam border, which if covered by BLACK SHIELD might yield additional data on Chinese military posture in South China. Effective BLACK SHIELD coverage of these targets would permit us to focus other reconnaissance assets on both the remaining critical targets near the Sino-North Vietnam border and those located deeper in the interior of China.

5. While it is recognized that this change in the restrictions on BLACK SHIELD operations might entail some small additional risk of losing the vehicle over the border area, the increased flexibility would make it possible to reduce a risk that is beginning to cause some concern. Because of current restrictions, the turning radius of the aircraft has caused a number of the standard flight lines to converge in the western part of North Vietnam. This convergence of tracks could be used by the North Vietnamese to improve their chances of using surface-to-air missiles against the BLACK SHIELD aircraft. A reduction in restrictions along the Chinese border would make it possible to introduce more variety into the tracks and avoid excessive convergence.



7. In view of the factors outlined above, it is recommended that higher authority be requested to modify restrictions on current BLACK SHIELD operations to permit increased flexibility in the China/North



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Vietnam border area. In such an event, COMIREX will take appropriate action to request that the Department of Defense intensify drone coverage of targets in the interior of South China and will continue to furnish the NRO the guidance required [redacted] of key indicator targets not adequately covered or not accessible to coverage by drone or BLACK SHIELD aircraft.



Chairman

Committee on Imagery Requirements and Exploitation

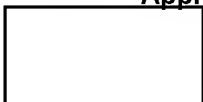
Enclosure
Tab A

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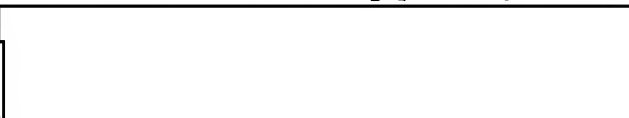
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TAB A

Comments from Alternate Department of State Member of COMIREX,
10 October 1967

Coverage as proposed would certainly be useful but in the light of all intelligence currently available and the collection potential of other intelligence systems, it does not appear that a case has yet been made for OXCART coverage to be accorded an overriding priority. As noted at COMIREX on October 5,

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Consideration might also be given to the capability of OXCART to cover targets mentioned in your memorandum by oblique photography from close to the border tracks planned to avoid violation of China. It would be useful to know what drone capabilities will be in the period ahead. At some point in assessing the requirement for the use of such a sensitive vehicle as OXCART over China, capabilities of SIGINT to provide intelligence on the South China area should be reviewed.

It is the Department's view that there could be significant political costs involved in the proposed use of OXCART; this is a matter on which we will want opportunity to comment later. It might be helpful if the USIB when it considers the use of OXCART could have before it proposed tracks showing various possibilities for covering the targets and the penetrations of China involved.

I am not in a position to comment on the operational factors mentioned in paragraph 5. I trust that all possible attempts are being made on each OXCART mission which passes over the area where flight lines converge to detect any evidence of a SAM buildup, and that other reconnaissance capabilities now in use over North Vietnam are being tasked to search for introduction of SAMS in the area in question.

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23 DDP TCO
24-26 CIA COMIREX Member
27,28 C/ICRS
29 Special Center TCO
30 IRS ReqBr/RecceGrp
31 D/OSR
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42 COMIREX Staff [REDACTED]
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